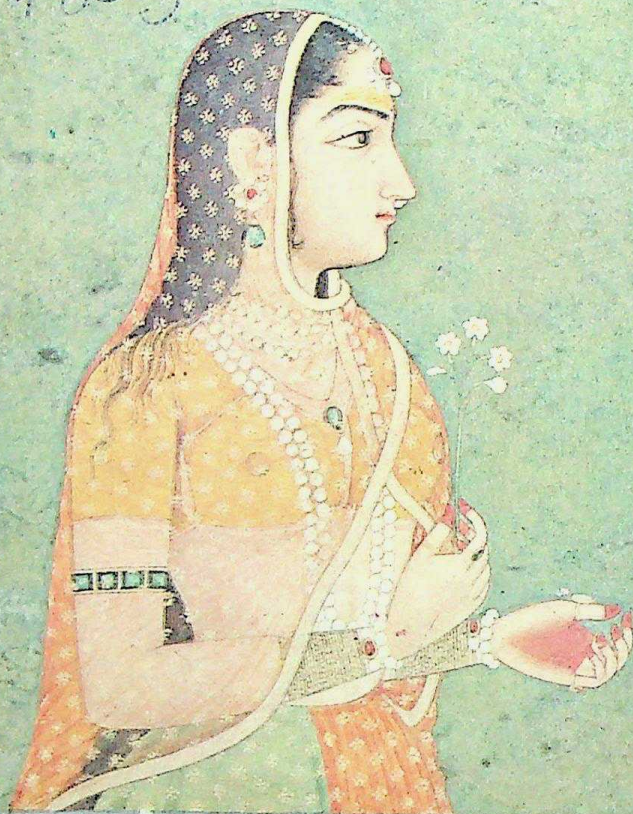


Indian Miniatures

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Mario Bussagli

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General rules, in attempting to evaluate the expressive and artistic qualities of ancient paintings by means of anecdotes, narratives and vague literary references, are very misleading—when the paintings have been lost..

If we are to believe certain written accounts and anecdotes it would seem that some artists were able to imitate nature so successfully that they could mislead even the acute perception of animals. But in the case of Indian miniature paintings, local or religious literary references do have the great merit of helping us to understand how the people of the time ‘saw’ and ‘interpreted’ these tiny compositions, descriptions of which immediately impress us by the originality of their subject matter, their bright colours, and refined treatment of detail.

To take one example, in the sixth act of the *Śakuntalā* by Kālidāsa—the most famous of Indian classical fragments, whose subtle poetry and delicate

emotion fascinated Goethe—King Dushyanta has lost his lady love, Śakuntalā, as the result of a curse. The unhappy lover consoles himself by looking at his mistress's portrait and asks a friend: 'There are three figures in this little painting. They are three girls and they are all beautiful. Which of them is Śakuntalā? Who do you think she is?' The friend replies: 'She who is leaning rather wearily against the mango tree, its leaves glistening with the water she has thrown over it. She extends her arm with infinite grace, her face is slightly flushed with the heat and flowers entwine her streaming hair to fall together over her shoulders. She must be Śakuntalā and the others her friends or maidservants.' Naturally, the king's friend was guessing but the realistic intentions of the picture are obvious. It was more than a portrait, for the artist had caught the subject at a particular moment in her life and had transformed it into a poetic episode.

This painter's talent and gift for minute detail corresponded perfectly to the aims and abilities of Indian miniaturists. Even when they worked in conventional forms they were still able to express profound psychological values in their compositions and insert details that had poetic as well as descriptive significance. Even clearer is another, somewhat scabrous, episode narrated by the prince Mitrāgupta in the *Daśakumarāracarita* (The Tales of the Ten Princes) which was written by Dandin in the 7th century AD. There was once at Mathurā—a great city

in central northern India—a young rake who assiduously frequented the most famous courtesans. One day he happened to see a miniature of a young lady in the hand of a wandering painter. Immediately struck by the beauty of the unknown lady, he asked the artist: ‘Master, I notice some contrasting features here. This soft body is of a lady of quality. Her slim figure and the pallid beauty of her features reveal her rank, but he who possesses such treasures has not enjoyed them as much as he might, for her glance is still haughty. She is not the wife of someone who goes on long journeys abroad for her hair is not tied up in plaits nor are there any other signs to indicate an absent husband or widowhood. Here is a sign on her left side: she must be the wife of some old merchant who is not excessively endowed with virile strength. She fully merits a man of great talent to execute her portrait, as may be seen from the quality of the work.’

Obviously the painter who thus involuntarily launched the young man on a new amorous adventure had made an effort to achieve something more profound and subtle than mere physiognomic resemblance, and the story stresses an aspect peculiar to all Indian art, both Moslem and Hindu. When they represented human beings, Indian artists always tried to characterise them in depth. They attempted to express the very essence of royalty in images of the Raja, the sanctity of ascetics and monks, the force and courage of warriors and the rhythm and heartbeats of life itself in every scene.



1. Buddhist divinity seated in yoga posture on a lotus.
Pāla school, 1087. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



2. Buddhist divinity seated on a lotus throne with the figure of a worshipper on the left and a flaming demon on the right. Pāla school, 1087. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

1. Buddhist divinity seated in yoga posture on a lotus. Pāla school, 1087. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Miniature from a Bengalese manuscript. The technique and style are derived from those of mural paintings as may be seen by the proportions and chromatic and figurative conventions.
2. Buddhist divinity seated on a lotus throne with the figure of a worshipper on the left and a flaming demon on the right. Pāla school, 1087. Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Miniature from a Bengalese manuscript. The centre figure stands out against the background with a luminous clarity appropriate to its serene expression. Of the two minor characters, the demon, shown as a deformed and clumsy dwarf, is of the *gana* type which belongs to the South Indian iconographic repertory.
3. The birth of Buddha. Nepalese school. Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University. From a manuscript of the *Prajñāpāramitā*. The future Buddha is here represented as the axis of the world and the support of the universe. The composition is completed by divinities and handmaids.
4. *Avalokiteśvara*, the compassionate divinity of Buddhism. Nepalese school, 1105. Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University. Cover of a manuscript. The Bodhisattva is enclosed by the lotus in a luminous aura and is wearing a halo. Note the crown, the enormous earrings and the stylised scarf.



3. The birth of Buddha.



4. *Avalokiteśvara*, the compassionate divinity of Buddhism, Nepalese school, 1105. Museum of Indian Art, Calcutta University.

- Besides this, both stories emphasise a particular aspect of Indian custom which conferred great importance on a portrait that could often be used for social and, obviously, erotico-sentimental occasions. The nature of Indian figurative arts, their diffusion and use, suggest an embryonic 'civilisation of the image' in which painting and sculpture serve not only to create a powerful means of diffusion for religious thought destined for the masses, but touch upon the most varied aspects of surrounding life. This does not mean that profane painting was not sometimes practised by cultured men and women, who took pleasure in painting and whose only aim was to create a work of art that could be appreciated by the restricted circle of their own friends and acquaintances, if not by the general public. Miniatures which were also executed as illustrations to texts were not only small-scale, highly detailed pictorial compositions, but were generally profane in the period of their greatest splendour. Sometimes they were used as illustrations for religious books, depicting images that had affinities with large-scale mural paintings.

As a result Indian pictorial art, which ranked as one of the foremost arts with literature, theatre and music, was divided into two categories: mural painting and painting on wooden panels or on cloth. The division was more than a technical one. The great cycles of paintings on temple and palace walls attracted the interest of a public far greater than that which could appreciate and understand paintings on

wood and cloth, even though what we now call art galleries (known as *citraśālā*) did exist for this restricted audience.

Mural paintings had a social significance and value that were greater than those of 'mobile' paintings, which were generally small in size even though the technical treatise on painting, the *śilpa-śāstra*, dealt exclusively with miniature painting. Judging from the *śilpa* and the very high quality of surviving works, which reveal an undoubtedly high degree of talent on the part of the craftsmen, it would seem that mural painting had assumed an absolute predominance over all other kinds. The scope of the technical treatises, which also dealt with the forms considered appropriate for the representation of divinities and personages, might have corresponded to a process of industrialisation which transcended the personality of the individual artist and even that of the simple 'school' (the Western type of workshop in India was barely developed) to give prominence to the corporation (*Sreni*). This industrialisation, or rather this endeavour, to achieve the most rapid and perfect execution of the work (taking into account iconographical clarity, easy comprehensibility and orthodox exactitude), corresponded to a widespread demand for pictorial works, the economic interests which this demand implied, and to the very nature of those who made them—the *śilpin*.

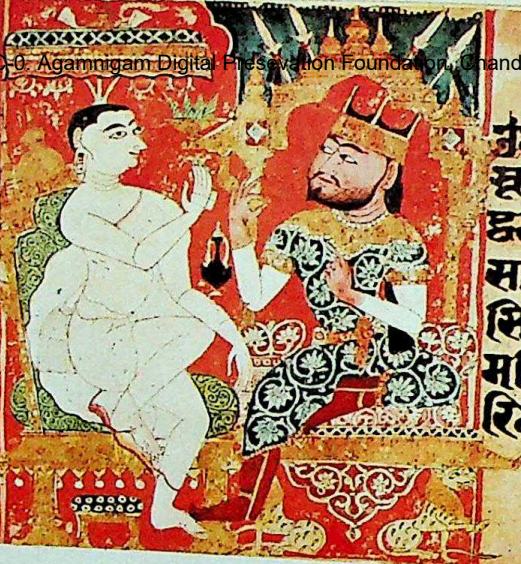
The name *śilpin* was used to designate painters or craftsmen who were on a much higher level than

artisans without being real artists, properly speaking, since their activity and cultural interests were different and less broad than those implied by the word 'artist' in the West.

Indian 'mobile' paintings on wood or cloth have been completely lost because of the Indian climate, and no miniature exists anterior to the 8th century. The few that have survived cannot be dated with any certainty as there is no documentary evidence relating to them before the mid-9th century AD. Not even the treatises on aesthetics which expound systems and theories—sometimes coming very close to those of Croce and Gentile a thousand years later—are of much help in determining the prevalence of one or the other type of painting. Material evidence is provided almost exclusively by literature and the theatre, the last consisting of recitation and scenography. Mentions of pictorial compositions are rare and, when they do occur, the commentaries are vague and casual. However, surviving Indian miniatures, belonging to countless different tendencies, schools and categories sometimes too numerous to be anything more consistent than an illusory phenomenon determined by the individual aspiration of some greatly imitated artist, do certainly form part of the 'mobile' paintings of a more ancient period and of an ancient miniature art which went with it and which has totally disappeared. This is proved by the two stories mentioned, among other things.

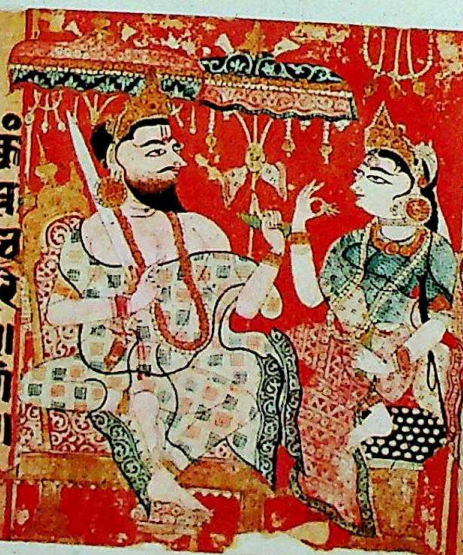
The full flowering of miniature art began when

तव आवर्द्धि
सादि एणा
एणादि वि
मिसादा ए
सदि पाव
उद्दण एस
लंव अंधा



उया सामंतता
हरिसम न्निय
दमा एस्स समा
सामिद्वर्तु
सिउय वयाणा
मणिय सुवय
रिय वयाणा सा

कम अर्द्ध
किन्निपत्र
सणा अत्र
उधरा एरि
निय उसा
विदकणा
दिवं सजा



तत्त्वमि नरना
रा। निज सदा
गणिय सच्चुमि
एपरिहीतां
वहारा जणां
युरुच्छिविय
पाडिकाणा

5. Kālaka converting King Śaka (above); Balamitra and his wife (below). Jain art, c. 1400. Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay.



6. Kālaka conversing with King Saka, seated on his throne. Jain art, 1428. Sans. Coll. 3177, India Office Library, London.

5. Kālaka converting King Śaka (above); Balamitra and his wife (below). Jain art, c. 1400. Prince of Wales Museum, Bombay. Two miniatures illustrating one of the first paper manuscripts and combining the *Kalpasūtra* (life of the Mahāvīra) with the story of Kālaka (*Kālakācāryakathānaka*).

6. Kālaka conversing with King Śaka, seated on his throne. Jain art, 1428. Sans. Coll. 3177, India Office Library, London. Miniature on folio 115 of the *Kālakācāryakathānaka*. The composition, which uses geometric and architectural motifs for the surroundings, is inversely proportional in symbolic value to the miniature on folio 129. The king, who has not yet fallen under Kālaka's sway, dominates the composition.

7. Kālaka instructing the Shāhi (sovereign) Śaka (Scythian) and his suite. Jain art, 1428. Sans. Coll. 3177, India Office Library, London. Miniature on folio 129 of the *Kālakācāryakathānaka*. Note the proportional symbolism by which Kālaka's stature is increased to clearly indicate his moral superiority. A great deal of relief effect is apparent in the treatment of Śaka's arms and horses.



7. Kālaka instructing the Shāhi (sovereign)

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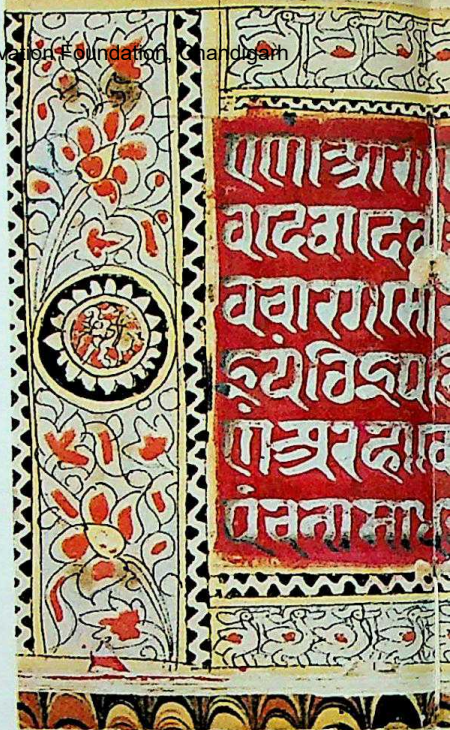
India came into direct and violent contact with the civilisation of Islam. The use of paper, mostly imported from Persia but also from China across central Asia, facilitated the diffusion of this generally profane art, which reached its highest peak of splendour during the Mogul empire between the 16th and 18th centuries. Indian miniature painting was also subjected to a strong initial Persian influence, but it was short-lived since Indian artists soon recovered their own independence and originality. Artists combined local and Persian elements with others from Europe, which were less organic and generally incidental but which had far-reaching effects and consequences. With the Mogul empire, Indian painting began a new phase in its evolution. Ancient and medieval traditions gradually disappeared and gave way to modern characteristics. Indian art in its various aspects awoke from its centuries-long lethargy and began a glorious renaissance to which the most vital contribution was made by the studios established at the imperial court—studios which could also be organised into schools. It was from there that illustrated manuscripts, album miniatures, portraits, celebratory or genre scenes and various other paintings made their way all over India. The example set by the emperors was followed by courtiers and vassals who established flourishing workshops and schools at the courts of the local Raja; and the vogue for miniature painting spread from the capital cities into the minor centres and into the provinces; where it

always kept its predominantly worldly, and of course secular, character intact.

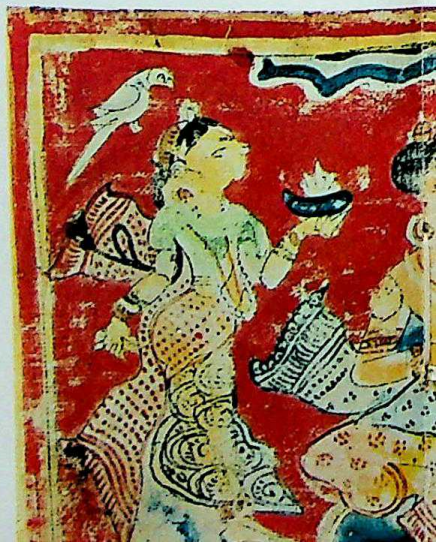
But before attaining this splendid phase, which was at the same time one of a political, religious, spiritual and social evolution, miniature art underwent a long preparatory period. This period has been widely documented and is characterised by various recurring technical and stylistic phenomena which have to be taken into account in any study of surviving works. The most ancient miniatures belong to a school, or rather to an artistic current, which was predominantly Buddhist and was usually named Pāla after the name of a north-east Indian dynasty which largely favoured the Buddhist creed in its mystic-magical form of the 'Adamantine Vehicle'.

As the technical term for the main currents in the Buddhist creed is 'Vehicles', meaning that they are all different ways of travelling along the spiritual path leading to 'Illumination' and, therefore, 'Salvation', it should be remembered that the diamond vehicle (the *Vajrayana*), the supreme way to attaining truth, largely made use of magical formulas evocative of the cosmic Buddha and the various figures in the Buddhist pantheon who assembled in themselves all the invisible forces at work around us. The *mantra* (magical formulas) and the *dhāraṇī* (magical formulas and syllables which serve for support in mystical experience) that were inserted into texts had their visual counterparts in the *yantra* (graphic symbols) and, naturally, in the miniature images charged with

8. Trisalā with the Mahāvīra (founder of Jainism). Jain art. Sans. Coll. 3177, India Office Library, London.



- 9 Group of people. School of Gujarāt, 1451. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.





8. Trīśālā with the Mahāvira (founder of Jainism). Jain art. Sans. Coll. 3177, India Office Library, London. Miniature on folio 76 of the *Kalpasūtra*. The Mahāvira, wearing regal vestments since he is still a prince, is approached by Trīśālā carrying a feather fan. In its very simplicity the composition is extraordinarily harmonious.

9. Group of people. School of Gujarāt, 1451. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution. Miniature on cloth from the *Vasanta Vilāsa*, an erotic poem written on a scroll. Even this composition is highly stylised in the representation of the main figures and minor details, but it is still a strikingly decorative work. The Indian element is more apparent than in the preceding miniature.

10. Fantastic landscape. School of Gujarāt, 1451. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution. Miniature on cloth from the *Vasanta Vilāsa*. The very marked stylised treatment of the mountains, which resemble flames, in contrast to the treatment of the trees and animals should be noted. The lion chasing the gazelles is Persian in type and could be a repetition of an archaic, stylised type dating from two thousand years earlier and which had survived through the centuries, even appearing in Moslem ceramics.



10. Fantastic landscape. School of Gujarāt, 1451.

attributes and symbols which had been originated to facilitate the task of the person pronouncing the formulas. The miniature image, executed in perfect conformity to the rules of iconography laid down for each divinity, provided a valuable starting point for anyone reciting the *mantra* and trying to evoke the same divinity of his own spirit. This was why some *tantra* (the works of the *Vajrayana* which were intended to lead the faithful to full 'Illumination' in this life and give them health, wealth and power) contain splendid miniatures which, to some extent, reflect the series of stylistic problems and their respective solutions of some mural paintings or sculptures of the mature period of Buddhist art under the Pāla. Some of these miniatures may be directly related to the decadent phase of the Pāla, or to the later period. What is certain is that they faithfully reflect the style of this dynasty, which took Indian Buddhist art to unsurpassed heights as it developed the stylistic premises of the preceding phase (that of the Gupta empire) which is usually defined as 'classical' because of the balance and harmony of its works.

The miniatures reflected the diffusion of the cults of Prajñāpāramitā, Tārā, Mañjuśrī and many other Buddhist divinities, thereby echoing the profound transformation which had affected religious thought some time earlier. Consequently Prajñāpāramitā, literally meaning 'knowledge which has gone beyond', was the symbol for esoteric knowledge personified in a female form regarded as the mother

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to such horrors as the suicide of the Rajput women during the siege of Chitor, when they threw themselves into flames which they had lit in order to escape falling into the hands of the victorious besiegers.

But even historical narrative scenes became balanced and restrained in spirit. This was partly due to the influence of European painting in which everything was always calculated even when it appeared spontaneous, and partly to the impact of the great personality of Mīskinā, an artist who may have been a Christian and who specialised in historical themes. We know for certain that he worked with Basāwan, Lal, Kesu the elder and Madhu the elder, on the *Akbar Nāma*, now 'in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and still the most beautiful historical work of the Mogul period.

During the reign of Jahāngir, Akbar's successor, Western influences were more noticeable and miniature painting changed in spirit. It was a precise reflection of the new dominant personality of the times. The highly cultured, sensitive, intelligent yet cruel Jahāngir, who had an absolute devotion for his beloved wife—the terrible Nūr Jahān, the 'light of the world', a Persian poetess of extraordinary beauty whom he had married at the cost of much bloodshed—showed his interest in the humble joys of the world and was passionately interested in the lives of Moslem mystics and dervishes, neglecting affairs of state to draw fresh spiritual strength from the contemplation of nature and works of art. In his last years he showed

48. Rāma and Sitā at Lankā. Mogul art, 1598–1599. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.

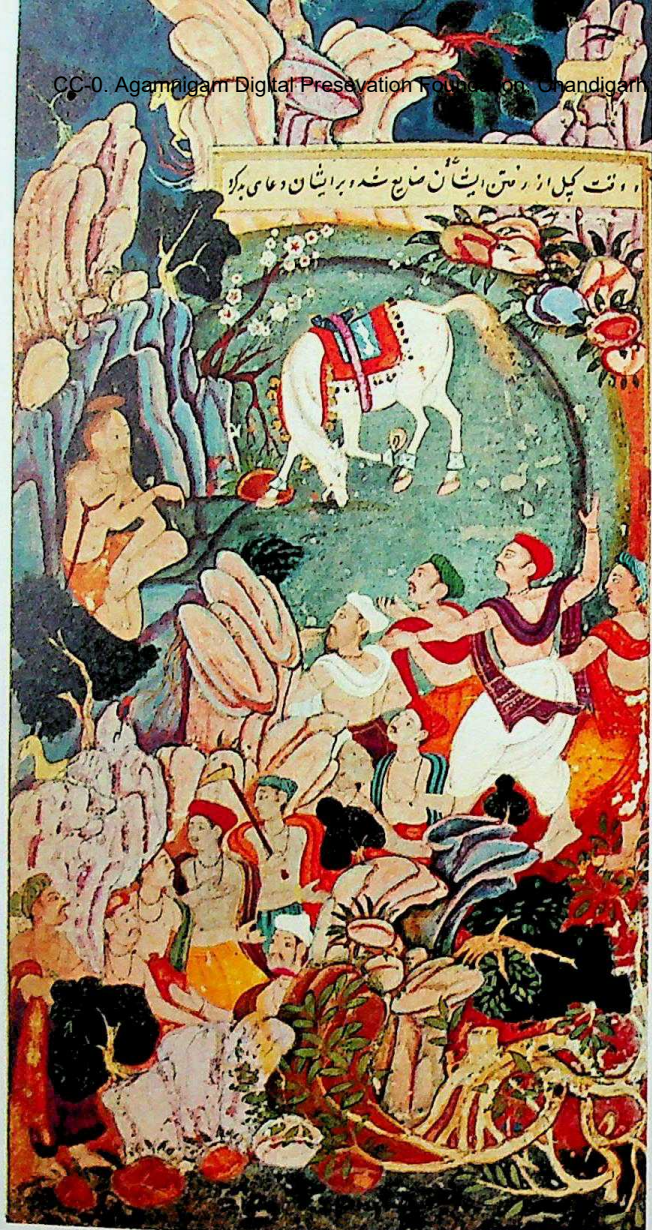
his interest not only in symbolical compositions but even in genre scenes which reflected real life, while his favourite painter, Abū'l Hassan, represented him with symbols of universal power such as the globe in his hand, a sign of total regality derived from the West, with his feet on a lion, symbolising majesty, or with his feet on the world.

In the final phase, Jahāngīr came to be represented as a supernatural being. It is enough to see certain scenes of apotheosis, or the cloud that rings his head in certain miniatures—later a common motif—to realise he had henceforth escaped from all human dimensions. It was this factor which led R. Ettinghausen rightly to conclude that these compositions reflect a very special kind of psychological evaluation due to the fact that Jahāngīr had been shaken in his constitution and morale by excessive indulgence in alcohol and opium and the hostility of his son, the future Shāh Jahān, who showed an implacable hatred towards the empress and the entire court. As a result the emperor appeared as an almost abstract and inaccessible entity, the source of the regality and power that others were fighting for and using for their own particular ends.

Under Shāh Jahān the Mogul empire entered a new period of splendour. The energetic and brilliant shāh dreamed of giving his empire a leading role in Asiatic history, but his dream was shattered by the military organisation of the Persians who had closely emulated European and Turkish progress in the arts

of war. But in the field of art, even though paintings still equalled or even surpassed the quality of those made during the reign of Jahāngīr, there was a process of involution, partly determined by the increase in the burden of taxation which greatly affected painters outside the privileged circle of court artists. In addition, the shāh was more interested in architecture, and although artists produced ever increasing numbers of commemorative portraits of him and showed an almost natural talent for amazing psychological studies of their sitter, the emperor was tired of pictorial problems. He preferred the enchantment of the splendid estates and landscapes in his immense empire, and the study of the relationships between nature and architecture, a style derived from that of Persia and containing several European elements.

The first proof of his architectural interests is the world-famous Tāj Mahal, which he ordered and had built under his direct supervision to honour the memory of the empress Mumtaz Mahal whom he had loved to the point of madness. In his final years he entrusted his eldest son, Dāra Shikoh, with the responsibility of supervising the library and the miniaturists' workshops. The faithful friendship for Dāra Shikoh of an Italian adventurer, doctor, artillery expert and daredevil, Niccolò Mannucci, led to the increase of Italian influence in Mogul miniature painting, particularly that of the Italian Mannerists which now became striking. The romantic, cultured, sensitive Dāra Shikoh was captured and put to death.



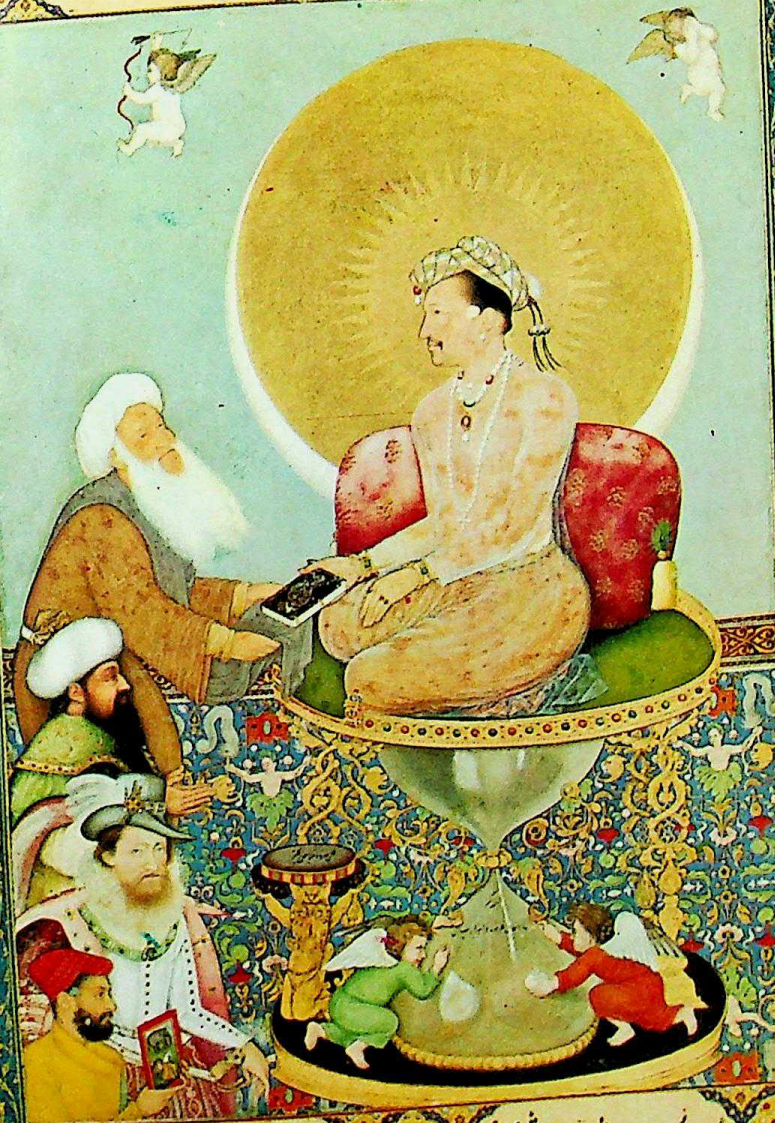
49. Encounter with a hermit in the wilderness. Mogul art, 1598–1599. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.



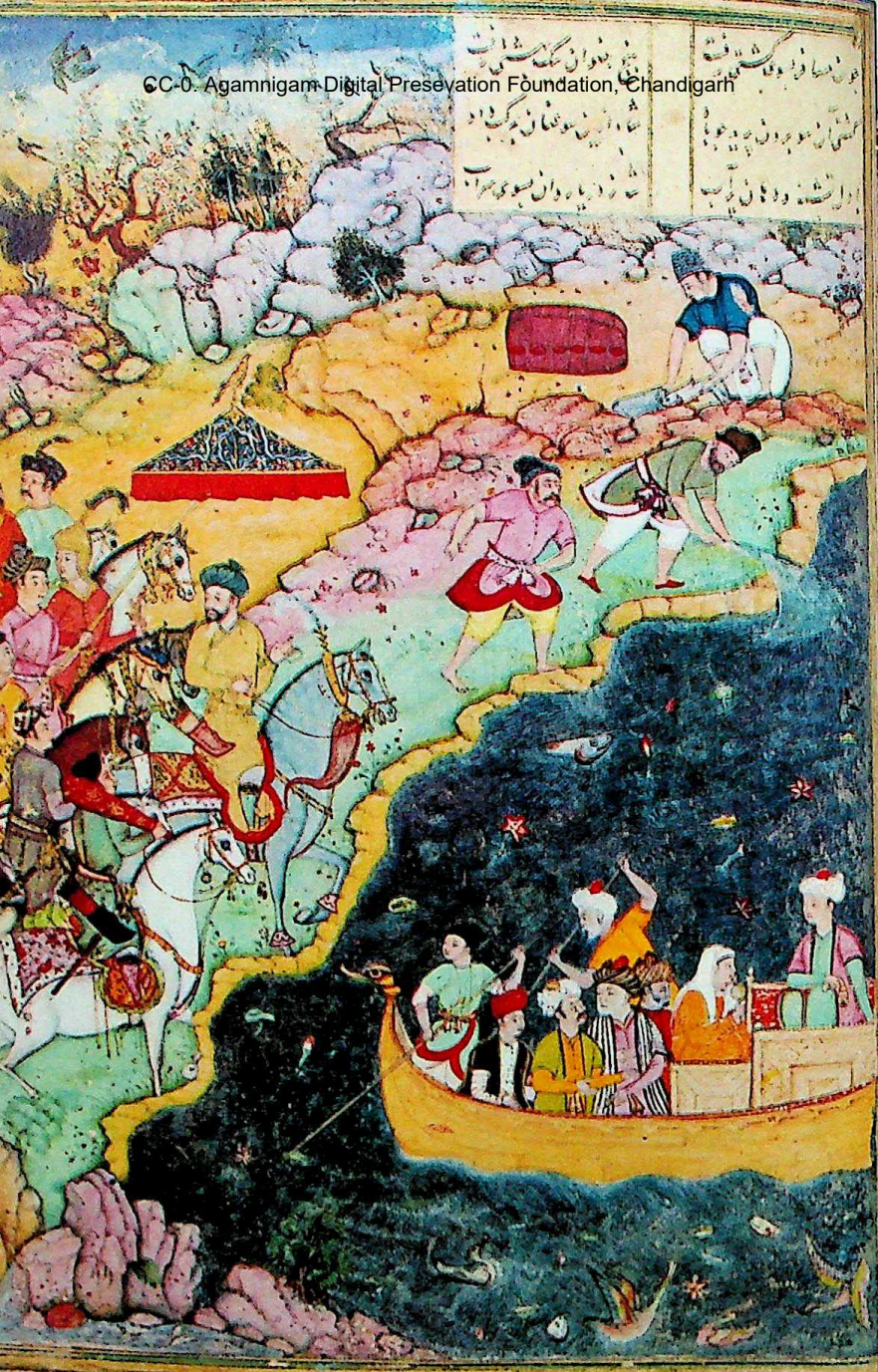
50. Meeting of Jahāngir with Shāh Abbās. Mogul art, 1620. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.

49. Encounter with a hermit in the wilderness. Mogul art, 1598–1599. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution. Miniature from the *Rāmāyana* by Vālmīki. A lyrical narrative scene with a typically Indian feeling for nature.
50. Meeting of Jahāngīr with Shāh Abbās. Mogul art, 1620. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution. Miniature of the school of Jahāngīr. The composition has been carefully balanced: the two seated figures are flanked below by two courtiers offering gifts. Note the accurate treatment of the fruits and objects.
51. Allegorical portrait of Jahāngīr. Mogul art, 17th century. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution. Miniature of the school of Jahāngīr. Signed by Bichitr. Jahāngīr is shown seated on a throne shaped like an hour-glass and talking with a mullah. Below, on the left, the figures of the Sultan of Turkey, James I of England and a Hindu. The scene displays the compositional talent of the artist, who has heightened his picture with gold and bright colours.
52. Illustration for an episode of the poem 'The Nine Paradises', from the *Khamsah* by Amīr Khusraw Dihlawī, a Persian poet (1253–1325). Mogul art, 17th century. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution. Miniature of the school of Jahāngīr, displaying strong Iranian influences despite the artist's attempt to compose a detailed landscape which might indicate that he was a Mogul painter.
51. Allegorical portrait of Jahāngīr. Mogul art, 17th century

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in prison by Aurangzeb, who was obliged to kill him before he could ascend the throne with any semblance of legitimacy. Mannucci then devoted his life to fighting against the forces of Aurangzeb in an attempt to avenge his friend.

With this last flash of brilliance, Mogul miniature painting began its slow process of decline. Although there were still some works of exceptional worth in the first half of the 18th century, when artists made elegant and fluent use of European perspective (although always in conjunction with Indian notions of composition) in a few famous masterpieces, the splendour of the school was waning and finally disappeared amid dull repetitions of themes and compositions that had been exploited to exhaustion in the period of the great emperors. But even this painting had succeeded in integrating the techniques and styles of three great civilisations: Persian, Indian and European

It would be a grave mistake to consider this brilliant page in the history of Indian art as being the product of a mechanical fusion, since the artists who wrote it had completely succeeded in dominating the foreign elements in their art. Although they learned to paint according to the teachings of the Persians, and derived their ornamental sense and graceful renderings of figures from that country, it was from Europe that they learned harmony of composition and a figurative liberty assured by the richness of a technique of pictorial illusion, and they succeeded in

52. Illustration for an episode of the poem 'The Nine Paradises', from the *Khamsah* by Amir Khusraw Dihlawi, a Persian poet (1253–1325). Mogul art, 17th century. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.

harmoniously combining all these various elements. From the beginning, Indian art had succeeded in assimilating various teachings, transforming them into new blood for an art that remained Indian from the start, even if it did sometimes show the prevalence of one or another source of inspiration. The last phase of the period saw the partial re-emergence of the ancient school of Indian miniature painting, for example in the portrait of a young Gujarāt woman, executed during the reign of Aurangzeb. It was almost as though all the experience accumulated in the great years of imperial splendour had disappeared to reveal the existence of a basic style that local traditions had kept alive. Although the portrait belonged to the Mogul school in time and place, it was really a revival of the Gujarāt style enlivened by new and vital elements. Moreover, although the adoration of Śiva in the form of a phallus, a work by Fateh Chand in the last quarter of the 18th century, showed traditional Indian characteristics in the composition of the trees, and European influences in the perspective and receding landscape of a mountain pass, it did demonstrate that the figurative experience of the Mogul school had also been used for Hindu themes—something which would have been unthinkable a few years earlier. This might also have been the remote effect of the reactions provoked by the intolerant orthodoxy of Aurangzeb, who considered painters to be ‘workers of the devil’ even though he did permit his familiars and courtiers to

take them privately into their service. His successors preferred to make different use of the riches at their disposal, and the new patrons of painting were the provincial governors, the Hindu sovereigns and the implacable enemies of the decadent Mogul regime.

It was only logical that all the most vital elements of style should pass, together with the artists themselves, into a more favourable environment in which such works were sure to be appreciated. This was yet another reason why miniature painting, like other arts, appeared to be chaotic and confused especially in the second half of the 18th century. It is difficult to study with necessary objectivity because of the tenacious persistence of preconceived ideas and curious prejudices even among specialists. The same situation recurs, with evident variations, when we examine the currents of Indo-Moslem art contemporary with the rise of the Mogul school. Even if it did occupy first place in miniature painting, together with the less refined but perhaps more spontaneous and clearly Indian Rajput school, it was by no means the only great school. That of Deccan, which centred around the states of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur and Golconda (the great centre of the Indian diamond market) appears ill defined and vague in character when subjected to genuine critical scrutiny, because of the difficulty of making any precise identification of the works belonging to it, except for one small group. As far as its general character goes, all we can say is that it shows differences from the Mogul



53. Krishna enthroned, with shepherdesses. Baohli art, c. 1710. British Museum, London.

54. Young women on the banks of a pond. Rajput art, 17th century. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution.

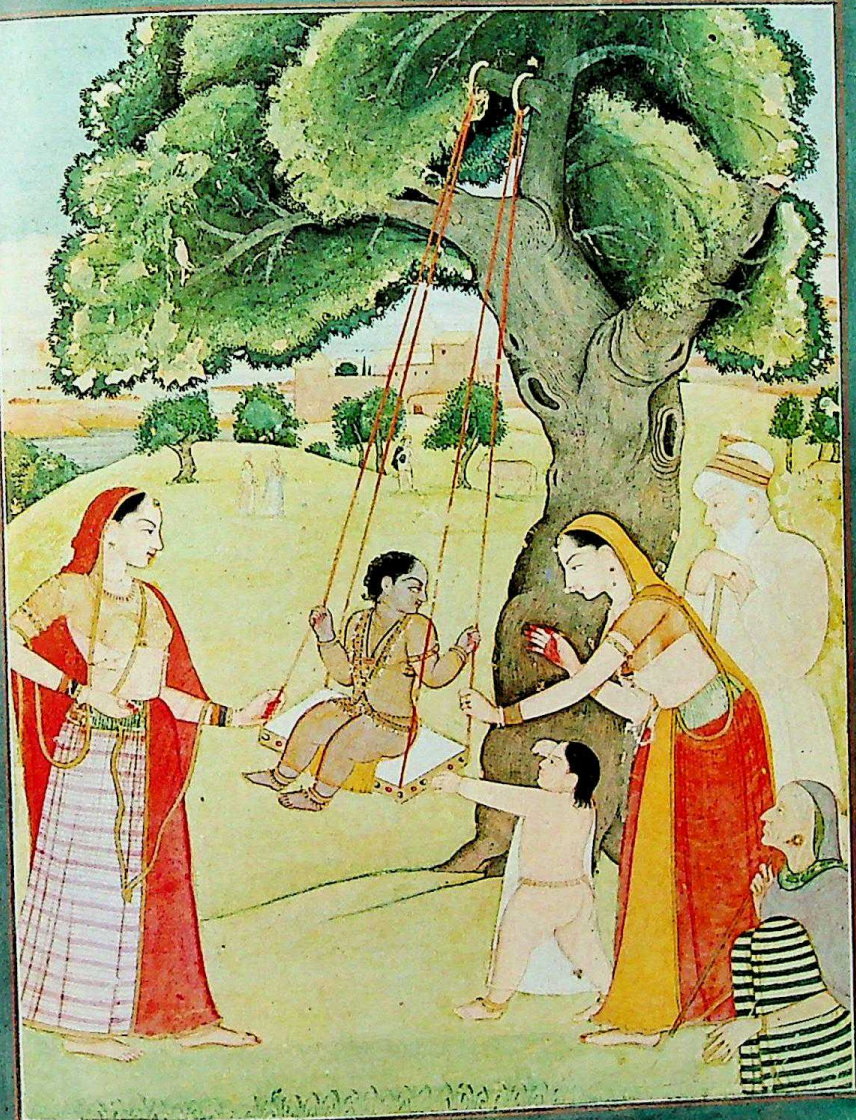


53. Krishna enthroned, with shepherdesses. Baśohli art, c. 1710. British Museum, London. Although the figures are stiff, the lines are soft and the colours are colder. The miniature, which suggests a scene in the forest, illustrates the evolution of the school towards its decadent phase. The trees, resembling enormous flowers, reveal the unknown artist's gift for stylisation.

54. Young women on the banks of a pond. Rajput art, 17th century. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution. Miniature in the Pahāri style of Baśohli. An elegant composition which exploits the lotuses and water in the foreground to emphasise the figures under a bent pine tree. A genre scene on the whole, with the semi-naked young girl throwing food to the two geese.

55. Krishna on the swing. Guler art, 1750–1760. British Museum, London. The scene, with its spacious and almost European landscape, is dominated by the powerful tree to which the swing is attached. An old man, an old woman, two young women and another child stand around the young Krishna.

56. Foretelling a hurricane. Guler art. 1750–1760. British Museum, London. Two figures standing on a terrace with a European-style balustrade under a greying sky are listening to the first claps of thunder and feeling the first rain drops. Their dance-like gestures, perfect, delicate profiles, and the finely rendered details complete this strange and lovely composition, which conveys a sense of fantasy. The highly coloured dress of the women suggests a rainbow.





school, both in its predilection for rigid, stylised, and to a certain extent decorative forms in a more obviously Indian style, and in the way it created high-priced works with a particular technique, their value being stressed by a lavish use of gold paint. Such works were effective enough and seemed to favour a stylistic compromise between Islamic aesthetic requirements, preferred by the local sovereigns, and the eternally reflowering Indian figurative tradition. Because of their Turkish ancestry the Deccan sovereigns maintained contacts and links with Ottoman Turkey for reasons which seem to have been partly political, unlike the Moguls who seem to have been linked to Persia.

Another factor which influenced the school was the interest shown by some kings in music. As a result, one of the most popular pictorial genres was the *Rāgmālā* (garlands of *Rāga*) which had as its theme 'the poetic traditions of melodic modes' (*rāga*) which Jeanine Auboyer considered to be 'a very artificial Indian form of the so-called "music painting" which can also be found in other schools'. In any case, interest in music predominated in this area as may be seen from the portrait of Ibrahim II, Shāh Adil of Bijapur (1580–1626), painted in about 1615: the sovereign, a noted music-lover and composer, is represented with the *kurtar*, the bicoloured castanets that were used by musicians as a kind of rudimentary metronome. The cultural climate was quite different from that of the Moguls, and it was

56. Foretelling a hurricane. Guler art, 1750–1760. British Museum, London.

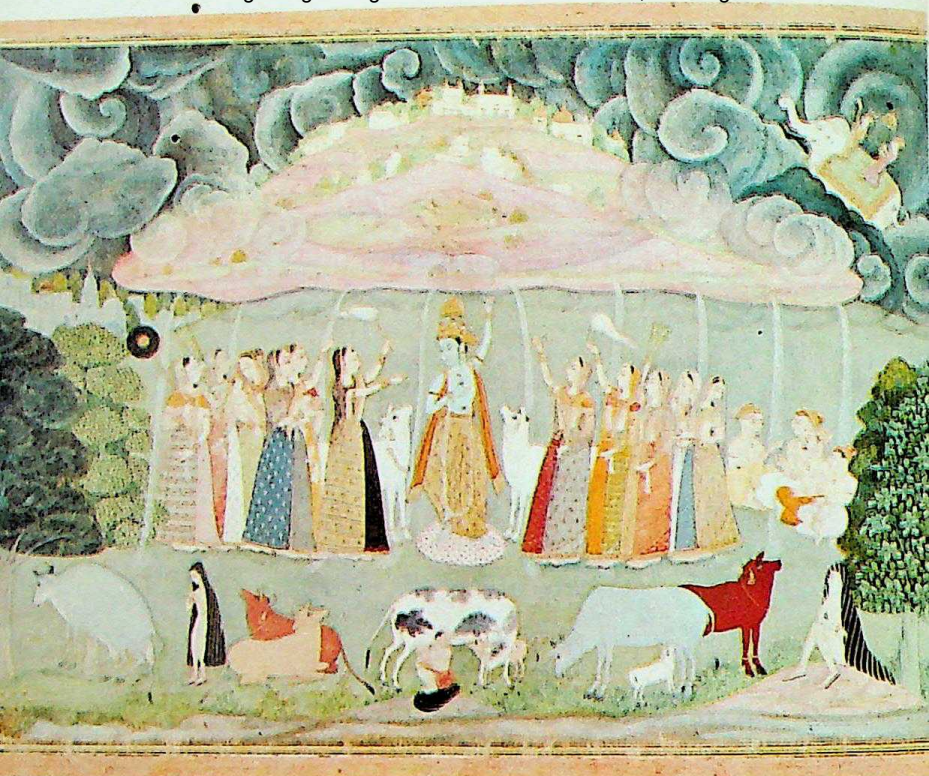
reflected in a figurative art which was less powerful and vital though it kept its independence even when the imperial school was at its apogee.

There is no doubt that Bijapur had its own great school of portrait painters who were able to create a particular type of portrait. That of Ibrahim II, with his gauze vestments flowing in the wind and his gold-thread scarf and shawl, is sufficient proof. The sovereign is standing against a background that is partly composed of plants and partly of architecture (detail of a palace painted in the European manner), with lotus flowers at his feet. The exotic plants, the splendour of the costume and the lively, baroque structure of the whole composition, are confirmation of the independence of the school which proved the validity of its style by the very fact of maintaining its autonomy. The style also succeeded in influencing one of the most famous Rajput schools, that of Bikaner, which oscillated between the Mogul and the Deccan styles. Most of the works produced at Golconda by the school that prospered under the local sovereigns, the Kutub-Shāhi, were lost when the Moguls destroyed Hyderabad, the cultural centre of the state. The few surviving works and various rather late miniatures that were imported into Europe show strong analogies with the styles and the aims of the Bijapur school.

The Rajput school represented a fairly widespread movement which was strictly Indian in character and, to a certain extent, opposed to all Muslim art in



57. Lady listening to music. Guler art, 1750. British Museum, London.



58. Krishna holding up Mount Govardhān to protect his friends from a hurricane. Bikaner art, c. 1690. British Museum, London.

59. Portrait of a man. Mogul art, first half of the 17th century. Musée Guimet, Paris.

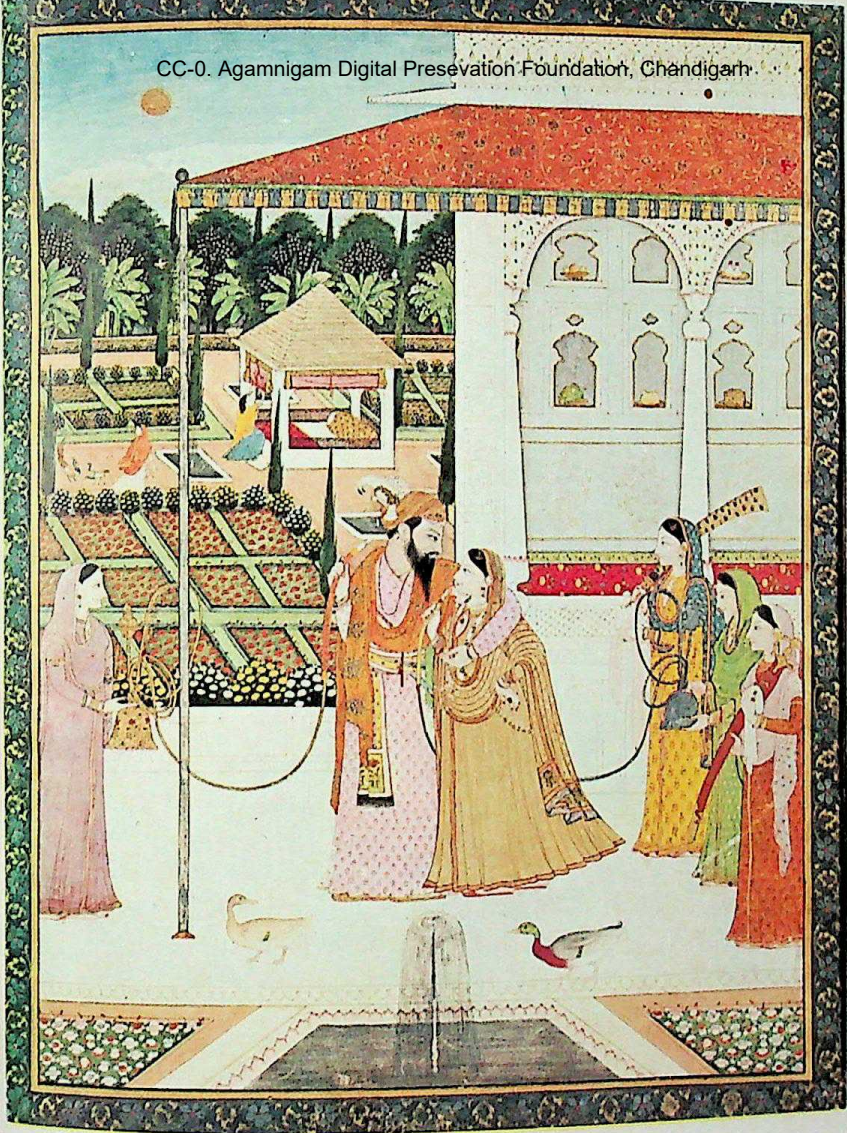


57. Lady listening to music. Guler art, 1750. British Museum, London. The scene is enlivened by the brilliant colouring of the background and the large carpet covering the terrace. The red baldaquin, the players' costumes and the flowering lily blossoms convey a serene sense of joyfulness even though the women's faces are dignified and almost cold, according to the Jammu style in which echoes of the Mogul style were adapted to the taste of the upper Punjab.

58. Krishna holding up Mount Govardhān to protect his friends from a hurricane. Bikaner art, c. 1690. British Museum, London. Miniature by Shahadin. Attention is focussed on the landscape of the mountain which serves as cover, on the green spiralling clouds with the monstrous elephant carrying Ingra, the king of the gods, and on the torrents of water gushing down from the uprooted mountain.

59. Portrait of a man. Mogul art, first half of the 17th century. Musée Guimet, Paris. A typical portrait of the Mogul school. The characterisation of the profile is fairly pronounced and extremely realistic. The body is sketched with increasing lightness.

60. A nobleman and his family. Pahāri (Chambā) art, first half of the 18th century. Musée Guimet, Paris. The composition embraces the architectural details of a lordly mansion with a spacious garden enclosed by a thin line of trees. The un-scientific perspective is helped and simplified by the geometric elements in the design. The master of the house and his lady are both enjoying the perfumed savour of water pipes while accompanied by their maidservants.



60. A nobleman and his family. Pahāri (Chambā) art, first half of the 18th century. Musée Guimet, Paris.

India. It owes its name to the valiant Rajput princes who resisted the Moslem advance and united or opposed their forces against those of the dominating Moguls. The Rajput race was descended from various Central Asian tribes who had intermarried with shepherds of the semi-desert Thar region, and it was the sole defender of the Indian world against the first waves of Moslem invaders from the north. Then, as always, the Rajput horsemen, paladins of a world that had for ever vanished, generously gave their blood and lives in a hopeless struggle, fighting with a courage bordering on madness, acting with loyalty, and honouring their vows as far as was humanly possible. This feudal community closed its ranks in the face of a society which they found unwelcome, kept their autonomy as far as possible, gave way only to the inevitable, fought only when necessary, and always behaved with exceptional nobility.

Rajput art was too spontaneous and free to be a court art. The miniature painter belonged to a corporation of craftsmen, was able to execute even mural paintings, and, perhaps, might even agree to paint scenes of domestic and palace life, without ever letting others know the secrets of an art which remained in the keeping of those who had inherited them from their forebears and who were bound to each other like members of a caste. Naturally, the subjects they preferred were not the same as those favoured by Mogul artists. Apart from representa-

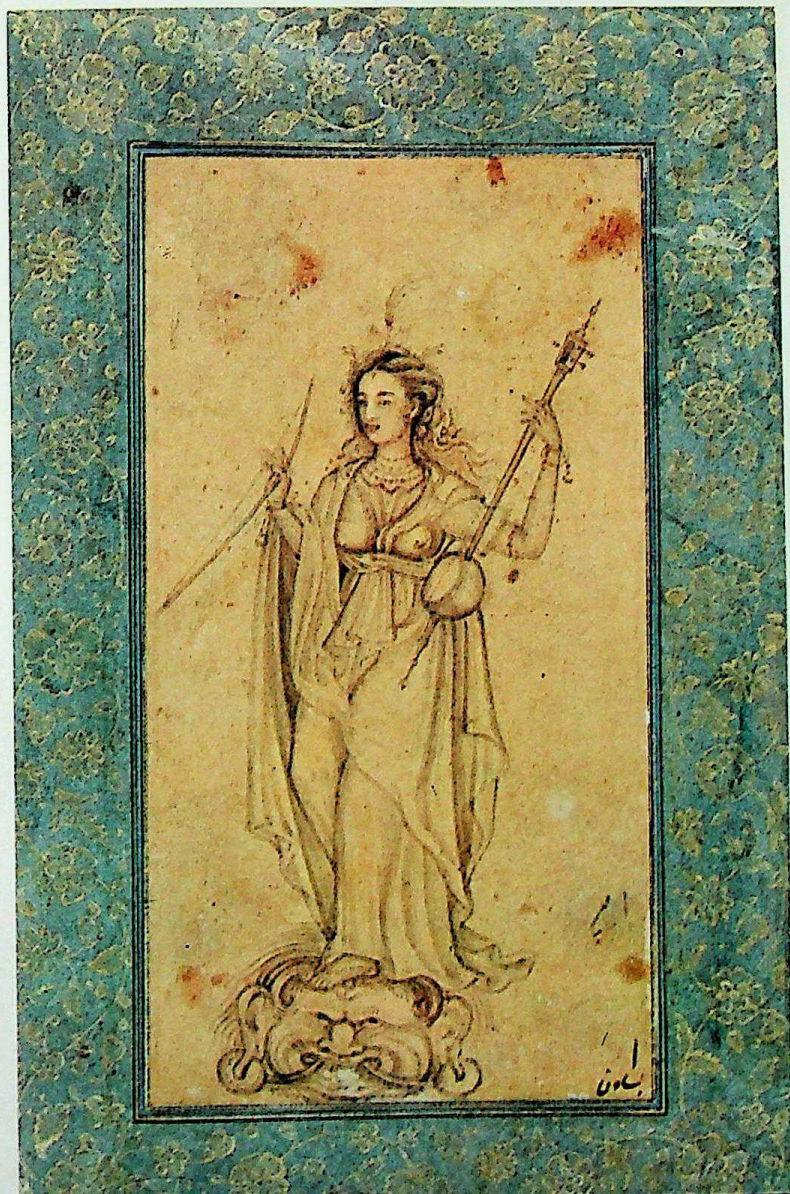
tions of official scenes, portraits of noble lords and powerful sovereigns, Rajput painters dealt with scenes from everyday life, religious festivals and ceremonies, mythological subjects and, in particular, episodes from the legend of the hero and god Krishna, the eighth incarnation of Vishnu who was worshipped, as in a large part of contemporary India not under Moslem domination, in his aspect as Krishna Gopāla or else as the boy shepherd surrounded by his shepherdesses.

Despite its wealth of erotic undertones, the legend of Krishna contained rather forced symbolical meanings, transforming an amorous summons into the appeal of the divinity to the souls of men and women, but it inspired and still inspires great poets and writers as well as artists. By a strange coincidence this theme, which had been made hugely popular by the diffusion of the story of the loves of Krishna and Rādhā, symbolising the divinity and the soul, diffused a spirit and a mode that came extraordinarily close to those of Western 'pastorals' throughout India. To quote Ivan Stuchkin, the story of Krishna and Rādhā represented 'a perfect breviary for lovers prepared to cross the country of Tenderness' exactly as in *Astrée*. We need only think of the innumerable varieties of sentimental attitudes proposed by the story of Krishna and Rādhā, and those found in the loves of the god and the *gopī*, and the shepherdesses of Brindāban who made a crown for him, to understand why it was that the subject was so pleasing to

everyone and was practically inexhaustible. It could serve for the most varied purposes, from those that were deeply religious to those that were plainly sentimental and erotic; from psychological studies to genre scenes. The feminine element predominated in it, amid surroundings that were rustic, idyllic and pastoral. It seems strange that the Rajputs laid such stress on these rather sugary aspects of a somewhat superficial religious form, so alien to their heroic, cavalier-like behaviour.

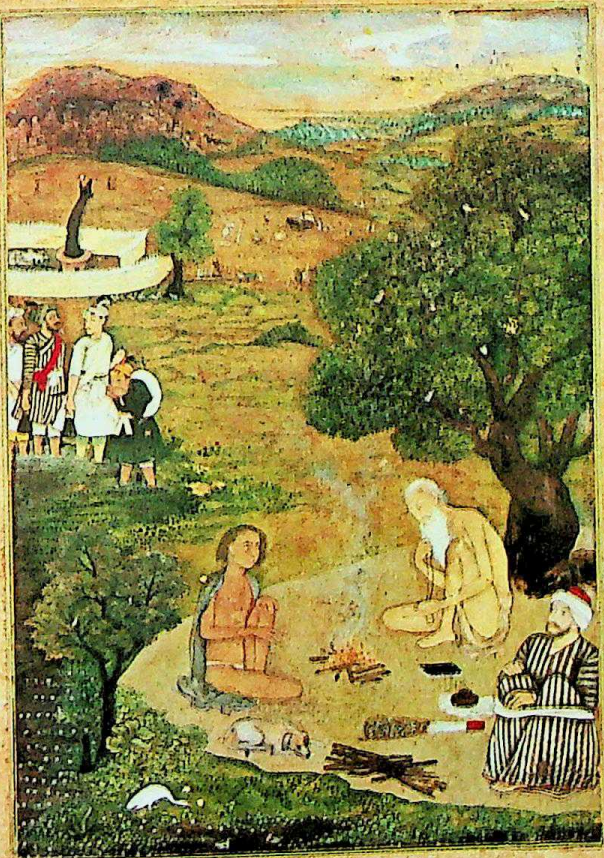
In its general lines, Rajput miniature painting, partly a derivation from the school of Gujarāt, was mostly based on drawing, although its use of colour often showed independent attempts at innovation. It may be divided into two principal branches, that of Rājputāna or so-called Rājasthāni miniatures, and that of the Himalayan school which was given the name of *Pahāri* or 'montagnard'. The 'montagnard' branch extended through most of the Punjab, the region of the 'five rivers' around the upper course of the Indus. Both branches included a notable variety of schools and local styles which are sometimes too small to be considered as stylistic and figurative trends in their own right. But it is possible to distinguish several great centres that played an undoubtedly important part in the evolution of Rajput painting. Although it often gave rise to forms and compositions that would have been inconceivable in Mogul art, many students regard it as a relatively autonomous variant of Mogul painting.

61. Symbolic figure of a woman holding a stringed instrument. Mogul art, 16th century. Musée Guimet, Paris.



62. Maharata horseman. Provincial Mogul art, early 18th century. Agamgani Digital Preservation Foundation, Chandigarh
63. Visit to a holy man. Mogul art, mid-17th century. Musée Guimet, Paris.





61. Symbolic figure of a woman holding a stringed instrument. Mogul art, 16th century. Musée Guimet, Paris. The painting, signed by Basāwan, shows that the artist had carefully studied Western prints. Not only are the draperies and reliefs rendered in chiaroscuro, but the mask on which the figure is standing is further evidence of the European element in the work.

62. Maharata horseman. Provincial Mogul art, early 18th century. Musée Guimet, Paris. Note the elegant stylisation of the horse and the portrait-like realism of the rider's face. The miniature fauna and tiny hunters in the hills below give a gigantic appearance to the main figure.

64.



63. Visit to a holy man. Mogul art, mid-17th century. Musée Guimet, Paris. Miniature of the reign of Shāh Jahān, mounted with a border bearing figures of masters and holy men alternating with flower and plant motifs. The Hindu ascetics sitting by the ritual fire under the tree contrast with the noblemen preparing to cross a ford.

64. Mythological scene concerning the personification of the planet Mercury. Provincial Mogul art, second half of the 18th century. Musée Guimet, Paris. This composition is rather exceptional for the provincial Mogul school of miniature painting. The isolated figure in the vast landscape corresponds to a spiritual attitude alien to Indian thought.

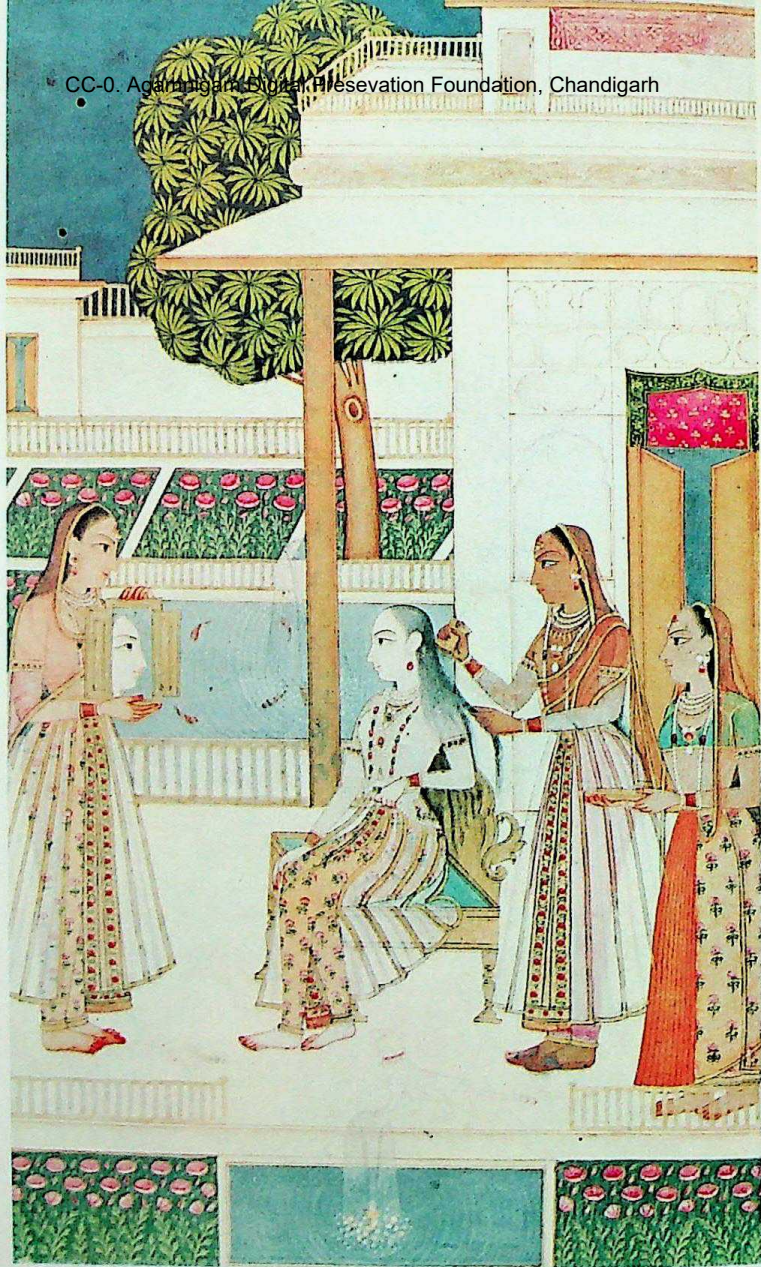


Where they have made distinctions, these have been based on content and subject-matter rather than form.

Rajput painting has been called religious although it included openly profane works quite as numerous as those which belonged to the traditional cult of the divinity, and the term profane art has been used for Mogul art to stress its narrative and commemorative aspects. But this division has now been rendered largely obsolete and has no real justification. Inasmuch as Mogul miniature painting influenced both branches of Rajput painting, the characteristic forms of the two schools were almost antithetical, if only because the Rajput school was rarely interested in creating the illusion of relief. Being born out of the two-dimensional painting of the Gujarāt school, it remained faithful to the two-dimensional principle despite variations of schools, sub-schools and tendencies. On the other hand, the difference in subject matter is quite aleatory since, even when artists were treating avowedly religious or legendary scenes, the more or less mythical subject depicted often offered a glimpse of Indian life or had sentimental and psychological undertones which, even if they did not contradict the religious intentions of the work, did at least reduce them to such an earthly dimension that the division of paintings by subject matter no longer held good. With this rather polemical premise in mind we may concede that, even when the reciprocal influence was prevalent, it

is hard enough to distinguish between Rajput and Mogul works. But it is not absolutely impossible since certain minor technical details, such as in the drawing or the costumes, can indicate a reliable way of making distinctions.

The Rājasthāni branch became fragmented into various main schools. That of Mewar, which had a principal centre at Udaipur as well as other minor centres, spread throughout the whole state and had its own character because of the diffusion of the teachings of a particular Vishnu-worshipping sect. Above all, it was characterised by artists who all differed from one another to some extent. Some used acid and strident colours while others favoured warmer and softer tones. Their works may be judged in various, contradictory ways by different experts with different views, but we must admit that, even when they varied in quality, they always had a naïve freshness which often placed them on a very high level. To condemn such works would be rather like condemning the works of Douanier Rousseau. But the school of Malva, from which the ancient Pahāri styles were derived, was more closely linked to the Gujarāt school and was less well defined geographically since it spread throughout surrounding regions, bringing with it a barbaric sense of joyful colouring, rhythmic and strongly spatial compositions and, especially, a tendency to give male faces heavy and sullen features. As for the school of Bikaner, it was a typical example of the way in which an original local



65. La toilette. Bihar school, late 18th century. British Museum, London.



66. Portrait of Khvājah Abul Hasan. Mogul art, mid-17th century. Musée Guimet, Paris.

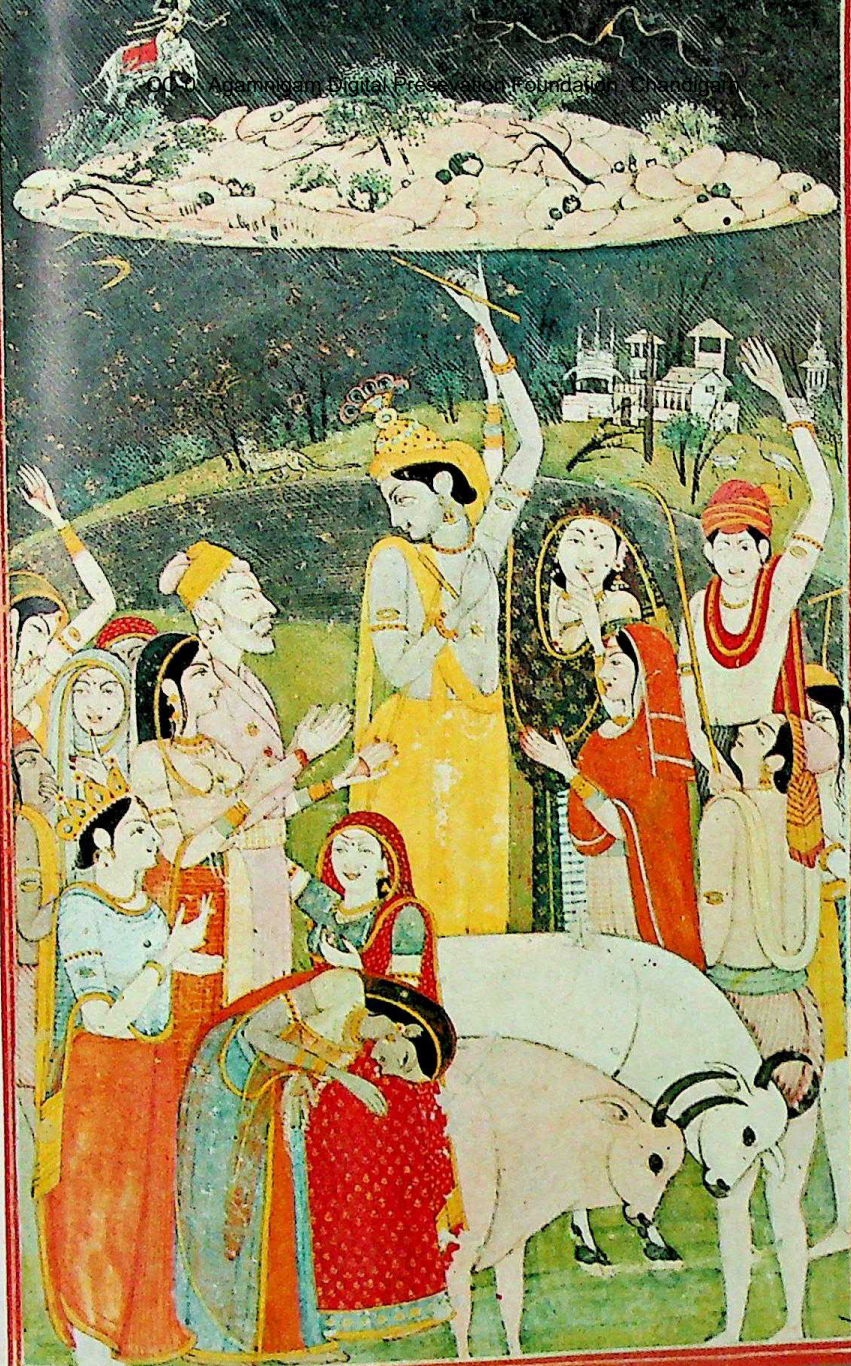
65. La toilette. Bihar school, late 18th century. British Museum, London. A lady on a verandah is complacently examining herself in a mirror while her maid combs her hair. The evanescent cat, the flowers, fish in the pool and the way gushing water is represented all give a special tone to the miniature.

66. Portrait of Khvājah Abul Hasan. Mogul art, mid-17th century. Musée Guimet, Paris. Painted by Hāshim (during the reign of Shāh Jahān). A classicā Mogul portrait of a dignitary leaning on the staff which is the sign of his rank. The hard features and penetrating glance of the old man are particularly striking while his sober coloured costume, enlivened by a coloured scarf, has almost become a simple patch of abstract colour.

67. Krishna holding up Mount Govardhān. Rajput art, 18th–19th century. Freer Gallery of Art, Washington. By courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution. Miniature in the Pahāri style of the Garhwāl. The work is by Molarām, the greatest of the Garhwāl painters, who was active between 1760 and 1823. The composition is strongly decorative and uses profiles, full face and three-quarter profiles in what is probably a memory of Mogul art. The overall effect is one of stiffness but the composition is enlivened by skilful colouring.

68. Rāgini Todi. Rajput art, mid- to late 17th century. Johnson Album XLIII, folio 20, India Office Library, London. The miniature may belong to the Bundi school. It represents a girl taming the wild animals who come running towards her. The patchwork style is only seemingly naïve, for with its brilliant and varied colouring it succeeds in creating a pleasing and almost elegant composition.

67. Krishna holding up Mount Govardhān. Rajput art, 18th–19th century.





68. Rāgini Todi. Rajput art, mid- to late 17th century.
Johnson Album XLIII, folio 20, India Office Library, London.

pictorial style could be almost entirely suffocated by political and cultural relations with nearby states and schools through a lack of great artistic personalities of its own and sufficient cultural and social foundation for it to evolve independently.

But that a local style and talent did exist is proved by the painting of Krishna holding up Mount Govardhān to protect his shepherd friends, their herds, and two *gopī* from a hurricane of cosmic proportions. A work by one of the major painters, Shahadin, who was active at the end of the 17th century, it is a fantastic yet balanced composition with a wealth of detail rendered with occasional great skill and ingenuity. Above all, it is a distinctive work and it suggests a stylistic evolution that had been partly suppressed and lost.

The school of Amber, one of the largest of the Rājasthān, was almost miraculously born out of the same concert of circumstances that had killed the school of Bikaner. A greater sense of balance and the keen sense of nature of some artists, and the indirect encouragement given by a young warrior and poet-prince who fell in love with a talented female singer who was in his mother-in-law's suite, probably all contributed to the creation of a little series of masterpieces, all indisputably superior in quality to those of Mogul painting of that time (the first half of the 18th century). Besides the school of Amber, mention should also be made of the schools of Bundelkhand, Marwar, Bundi and the minor

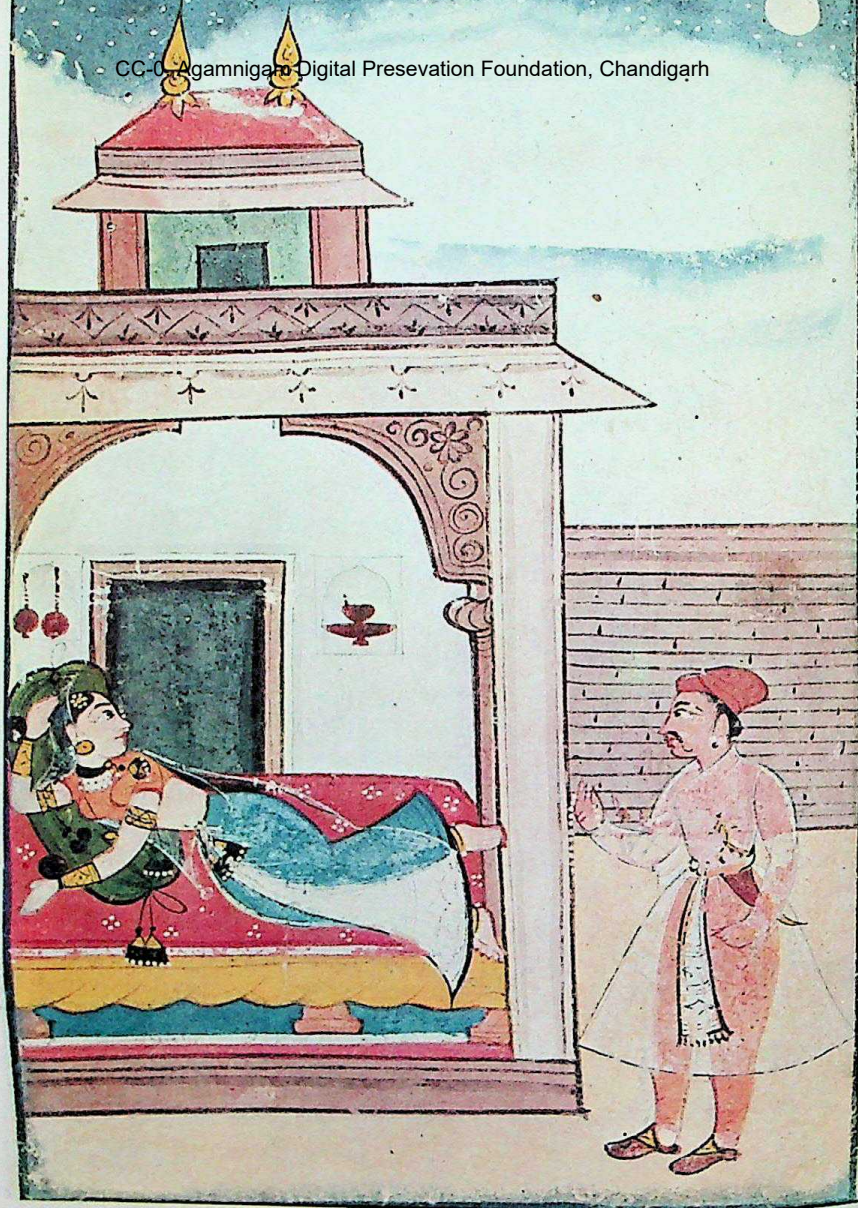
school of Bihar, which was not really Rajput and which produced some fine works at the close of the 18th century. In all these schools the process of evolution, which produced different and sometimes excellent styles, was analogous to that of the Rājasthāni branch and might be summed up as a continuous dialogue and contrast with the Mogul school.

As for the 'montagnard' school of the upper Punjab, although it had undergone a different evolution since, in its last phase, it had been influenced by the presence of the Sikh confederations and their subsequent transition to an organised state and a nation (a political-social factor of the first importance), it was subdivided into forty schools and sub-schools which are often simply labels for the more convenient cataloguing of small groups of works. Traditional critics mostly concentrate on the centres at Basohli, active between the 16th and 18th centuries and which went from an archaising phase to a period of strong Mogul influence that was soon overcome, thus opening the way for a truly 'montagnard' school—Jammu, Guler, and Kāngrā. Apart from the presence of a few exiled Mogul painters at Guler and the consequent transformation in local style, none of these centres showed a coherent evolution that could be followed in time.

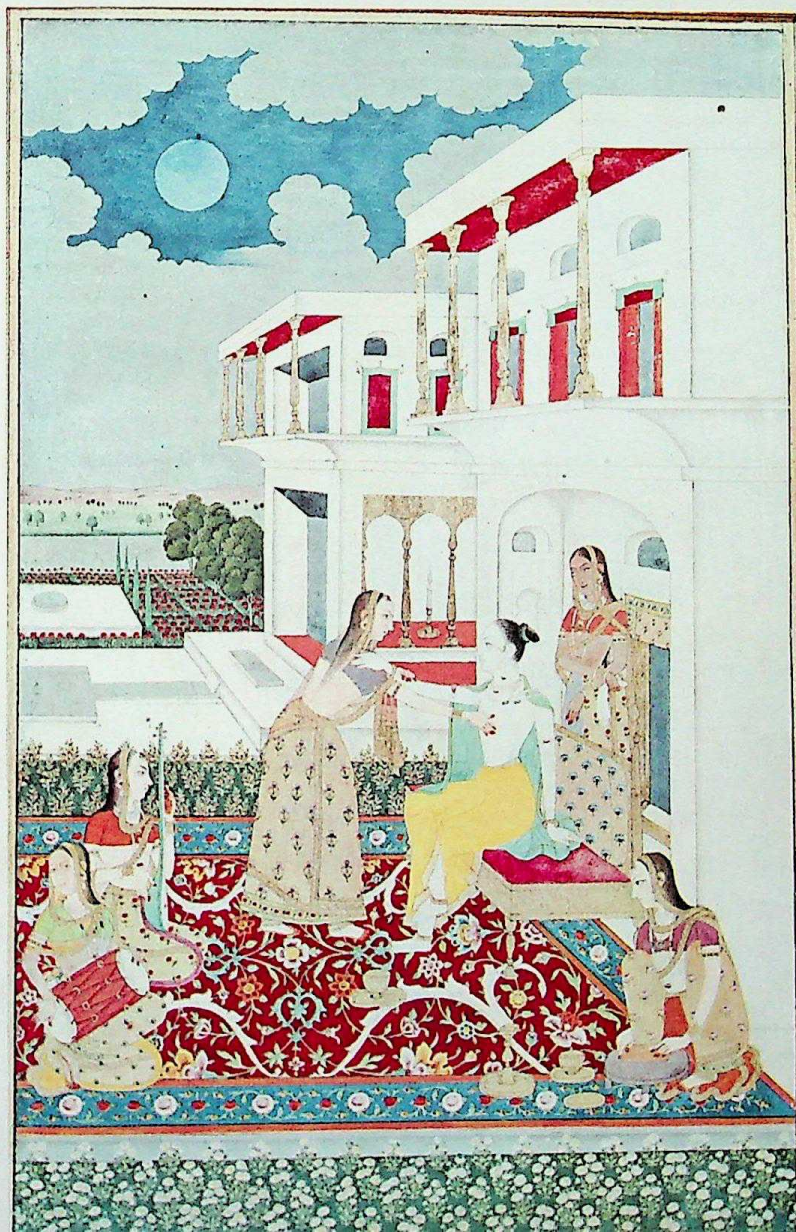
Rather than 'schools' we should consider these centres as the focal points for various currents in art which would change, increase in importance or disappear according to the prevalence of one or another

stylistic tendency which might be due to the presence by chance of some artists of genius who had found a valid way of renewing past styles, or to some occasional contact which brought about a change in traditional formulas. We might say that this lively and romantic school of 'montagnard' painting, which was sometimes of a very high quality, is still waiting for a precise critical evaluation to clarify its history and give it the rank it deserves—a rank certainly far above that of mere folk art which has sometimes been assigned to it.

There was, it is true, a latent rebellion against a dominant figurative culture which might have stifled it, but besides the fact that the two cultures in question were rooted in different soils and had almost antithetical social and political systems, that its own style was never stifled should be more than enough to show that it was more than mere folk art. Moreover, the skilful drawing of the 'two Sikh noblemen', the refined composition of the *Gangāvatavara* (the descent of the goddess of the Ganges), or lastly, the illustration to the *Utkā Nāyikā* (young girl awaiting her lover) which is a variation on the theme of the loves of Krishna and Rādhā, is sufficient proof of the full autonomy and validity of the so-called Kāngrā school which may be difficult to define exactly but which showed itself to be animated by a clear artistic determination, a refined taste, and great technical skill.



69. Rāgini Lalita. Rajput art, mid- or late 17th century.
Johnson Album XLIII, folio 4, India Office Library, London.



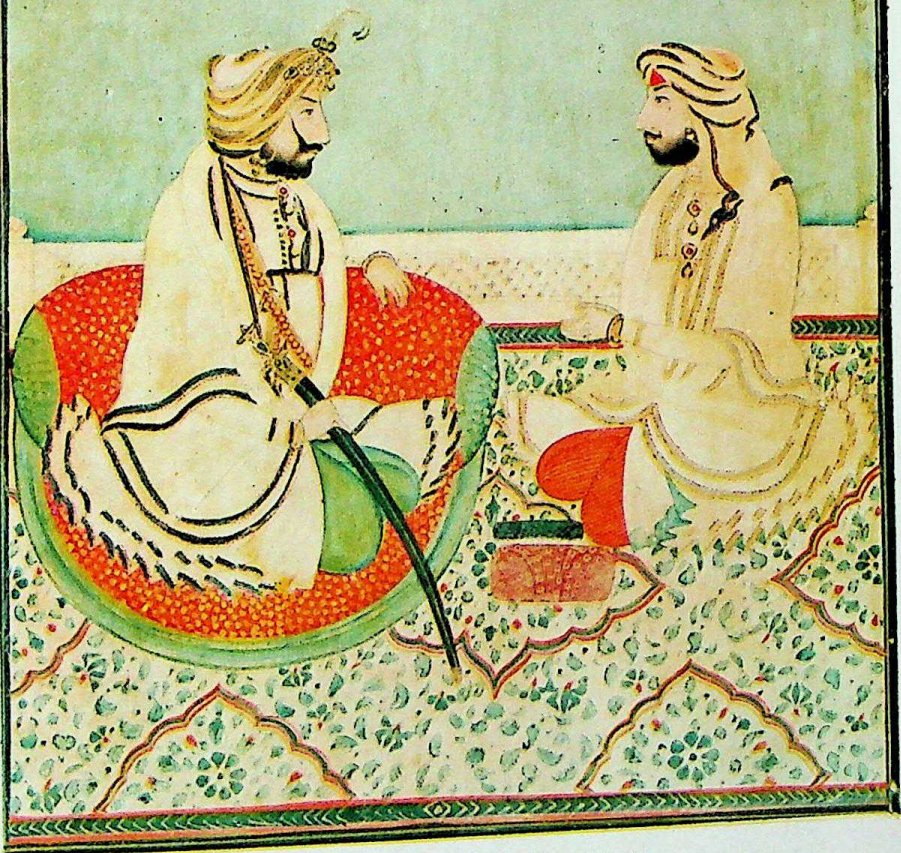
69. Rāginī Lalita. Rajput art, mid- or late 17th century. Johnson Album XLIII, folio 4, India Office Library, London. Perhaps a miniature of the Bundi school. The *rāginī*, a pictorial expression of musical themes, represents a genre of unknown origin which only flourished after the Moguls. In this instance, a lover visiting his beloved at night.

70. Krishna and Rādhā playing. Jaipur art, late 18th century. Johnson Album XXXVII, folio 5, India Office Library, London. Apart from the large carpet, the perspective is strictly scientific and of European derivation. It is helped by the prevalence of simple architectural elements.

71. Two Sikh noblemen: scene of a visit with the two characters rendered as portraits. Sikh school, late 18th–early 19th century. British Museum, London. A typical composition combining echoes of the styles of the northern provincial schools, re-elaborated in a style with a predilection for thick, strongly decorative, undulating lines.

72. Episode in the legend of the goddess of the Ganges, Gangāvatarana. School of Kāngrā, late 18th century. Johnson Album XXXIV, folio 4, India Office Library, London. The artist was Udūt Singh Musavir. The goddess is shown with Śiva, and the snake is a sign of the presence of the *māga*, snake-spirits of the waters. The elephant skin has symbolic value also.

73. Utkā Nāyikā: girl waiting for her lover. School of Kāngrā, late 18th century. British Museum, London. Sitting in an idyllic landscape between trees which form the background, the girl is covering her gentle and beautiful features again after having momentarily lifted her veil to look anxiously for her lover.



71. Two Sikh noblemen: scene of a visit with the two characters rendered as portraits.

72. Ecce deus in the legend of the goddess of the Ganges
Gangāvataraṇa. School of Kāngrā, late 18th century.
Johnson Album XXXIV, folio 4, India Office Library, London.



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Kāngrā, late 18th century. British Museum, London



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